Design and Setting

See SG for introductory notes.

* Answer these questions about the film as a whole. Be sure that your answers include enough specific details of sets and scenes so that you can write a good answer on setting. As you answer the following questions, consider not just what you are told, but **HOW** these things are made clear.

1. **Which of the descriptions – real, imaginary, naturalistic, expressionistic, fantastic, symbolic, literal – best suit this film?**

Real – it was shot on location, and in the very country in which it was set; naturalistic, literal.

1. **When is the film set? Cite evidence.**

2004: the date on the back of the Dypraxa packet; confirmed by the dates on the computer screen for Grace Makanga's tour; scenes of Tessa and Justin meeting probably a couple of years earlier.

1. **Where is this film set?**

Kenya mostly + London, Berlin and the Sudan

1. **Setting is not just time and place; it is also the social setting – the people among whom the action takes place. Explain the social setting for this film.**

Two main groups – the Kenyans and the British diplomatic and business presence in the country.

The Kenyans are represented by Dr Ngaba, the Health Minister, the various health workers; the police; and the many at the other end of the social scale: the servants, the children in the slums, the patients in the hospital. Most of them are poor and many suffer from poor health.

The British are mostly wealthy and of the 'ruling class' – this includes Tessa and Justin. He is from a diplomatic family – "Quayles have always made reliable foreign service men," says Pellegrin – and she comes from money: "Tess left you bloody well off."

Kenny represents business interests and is not of the same class – "He's a crude sort of chap, our Kenny, but he flies the flag for us". When he is in trouble, he decides to go down fighting: "I want a trophy. That's what you lot do, isn't it? Heads on walls." – 'you lot' being the British ruling class.

The events take place in the interface between the three groups – the abuse of poor Africans by callous European commercial interests – as well as by their own politicians and health workers – with the connivance of HMG.

**Director Fernando Meirelles:**

Our actors were able to meet people from the High Commission and went to their houses to see how they live. We had lunch in London with diplomats working in Kenya. Our feeling, talking to them and being in their offices, was that the HC these days is like any other business. It looks like Unilever or Shell; it's really about doing business and making opportunities for business. Although it's been 42 years since British rule in Kenya ended, there's still a tie that binds – now mostly for different reasons.

Meirelles felt that his perspective was different from the outset.

John le Carré wrote a story about a developing country and big business from the point of view of a person from the First World. When I read the book, I put myself in the other position. I saw myself in Africa, with the big companies coming in. In some respects, Jeffrey Caine's script tells the story through Kenyan eyes and, as a person from the Third World. I identified more with the Kenyans than with the British.

**Danny Huston (Sandy):**

I had a meeting in London with two gentlemen who shall remain nameless, since they worked for MI5 and MI6. The more time I spent with them, the more I felt that they were actually like the people portrayed in the book. They have an extraordinary, sometimes spectacular, way of not answering a question you ask them.

**Scriptwriter Jeffrey Caine:**

The Kenyan setting attracted Fernando to the film, I think. But what he inherited was as story told through British eyes, embedded in a British post-imperial subculture with which he wasn't wholly familiar. Unsurprising then that he would want these elements de-emphasised and the African elements given more prominence, without tipping the story out of balance. This I think we achieved.**Producer Simon Channing Williams:**

I feared we might get stuck in a 'middle-class British male' box. When Fernando signed on, suddenly all those middle-class prejudices were thrown out the window. Instead we were getting an entirely new vision of the world that le Carré wrote about, visualised from a deeply intelligent foreign national's point of view. Fernando's perception is all to do with character as opposed to class. Our British class structure is not important to him; it was great that we could get away from that, and tell the story as seen by 95% of the rest of the world.

**Production Designer Mark Tildesley:**

When I first read the book, I thought it was something that described and would appeal to my father's generation. But then we went to these clubs in Nairobi and it's like a time warp, even at the BHC. They try to get funky and tell you they ride a bike to work, but then they ring a bell for breakfast and people come to serve it with white gloves. What we really needed was to make people have a sense of Africa and care about Africa in order to understand the story. So it couldn't all be cricket and gin-and-tonics.

1. **How important is the setting to the story?**

The African setting is vital – the film is about Africa and the way it is being abused – though there are probably other countries apart from Kenya for which the story could be equally applicable. The contrast between the slums and the BHC is important for underlining the themes; and the emptiness and dangerous frontier aspects of the areas out of the city are important for the plot.

**Current British High Commissioner to Kenya Edward Clay:**

In the first place, it's a work of art. You don't have to accept that British diplomats are really like this, you don’t have to accept that particular pharma companies in Kenya are the ones that the author had in mind. It's a fine love story, wrapped in a parable that has real power and credibility. But the problems that le Carré describes are potential as well as actual. Kenya is not the only country where he could have set the story, but it was a good setting. It could have been another government; it could have been another industry. But the point about the risks and the temptations of exploitation between the rich and powerful and the poor and vulnerable is very important and very telling.

Clay and his staff briefed actors and film-makers on the political, economic and social context of Kenya – both as it was when John le Carré wrote his novel, and as it is now, just a few years later. He says that the Kenya of today is not the Kenya of the book and film:

Africa is not an undifferentiated basket case; there are successes, and some of the countries that used to be on their backs are now doing quite well. Kenya has done relatively badly by comparison over the last 20 years, fundamentally because of problems of governance. …when le Carré was writing his book, he was writing about a Kenya of a particular era which was a very plausible setting for the story that he wanted to tell. [Now] we're in a Kenya where government and society have decided and votes quite decisively for change – that Kenya will not be a byword for poor governance and corruption as it used to be.

In spite of its criticism of Kenyan politicians, the Kenyan government was supportive of the film.

**Raphael Tuju, Minister of Information and Communication:**

*The Constant Gardener* is very critical of Kenya and it is unprecedented that this government would support it and license it. But I went ahead and made sure that we did so, because if we didn't support it being filmed here, it was still going to be filmed somewhere else, and it would still be critical of Kenya in the past, with respect to issues like corruption.

1. **Choose two or three specific and significant settings, and outline the techniques of filming, sound and music, lighting, and costumes that were used to help create an indelible impression. Choose ones that are strikingly different or contrasting. [# Good group exercise]**

e.g. **Kibera:**

no fresh water, no sewerage system - open sewage drains; cooking outdoors, barefooted children; pigeons, chickens, goats; rusted corrugated iron roofs; train runs through it; train line used as thoroughfare, bicycles

natural light; aerial and H/A shots; TRACKING shots of children and workers

same distinctive colours – rust-red, sky blue – used by street theatre also

sounds of train, of children, of animals, of drums; plus African music on soundtrack

The slum scenes were filmed in Kibera, the largest slum in sub-Saharan Africa. Kibera is a sprawling shantytown of about 600 acres with an estimated population of between 800,000 and 1.2 million, most of whom live in makeshift huts constructed from scrap timber, mud and corrugated iron – and without sanitation, running water or electricity. The 'streets' are a labyrinth of raised pathways, and shallow trenches winding among streams of raw sewage. The main drag is a working railway line that bisects the shantytown. Residents set up shop along the tracks, laying out anything of conceivable value to anyone. Many of the Kenyan crew members had never been there and were shocked by the conditions under which these people were living. People live in Kibera because it is close to work and relatively safe; there is little theft because there is nothing worth stealing.

**Lake Turkana**

vast salt flats that resemble the surface of the moon; striking colours: blue and green water, whites and rust-red of shore; flocks of flamingos; absence of other life

AERIAL, H/A; TRACKING birds

- actually shot at Lake Magadi, which is more accessible than the real L. Turkana

**Pellegrin's club**

Overpowers with the sense of privilege, of class, of the power of the ruling classes, of the establishment. Magnificent architecture, especially the staircase; the chandeliers, busts, sculptures; the rules, the hushed atmosphere – all designed to cow and control.

Genteel bullying starts with the porter – can't take briefcase into dining room. Shot in LS and ELS to start with.

Bill Nighy's sinister mandarin takes [Justin] to luncheon at his St James's Club. The Brazilian Meirelles is clearly a stranger to this habitat and his anthropological detachment enables him to bring out the essential strangeness and concealed brutality of its rituals. – **Peter Bradshaw, *Guardian***

The original plan had been to shoot in South Africa, where there is an established film industry and infrastructure. But after only 24 hours in Kenya, both producer and director were certain they wanted to film the story where it was set.

**Mario Zvan, executive producer:**

East Africa is very different from South Africa… The people look different, the vegetation is different, the light is different, the buildings are different. Shooting this story in South Africa would have been like filming a Boston tale in Miami.

**Rachel Weisz:**

Nothing against South Africa, but the Kenyan landscape has a particular spirit and you can't just try to mimic that somewhere else. I can't separate Kenya from the story or the story from Kenya.

**DP Cesar Charlone:**

We were very concerned that this looked real. We were trying to show the truth, to be as faithful; as we could be, using real locations and natural light. If a mortuary was lit with fluorescents, we went with fluorescent lighting. It was very important to us not to choose locations because they were more filmic or more beautiful.

Then as we started getting deeper into the project, it was as if we were dealing with two different realities, two different worlds. There was Justin's old world, where he came from, with the BHC. As he finds out more about Tessa, she becomes his door into a new world, the real Africa that he had been unable or unwilling to see. We determined that Justin's world (England) would be cool greens, while Tessa's world (Africa) would be in warm reds.

**Bill Nighy (Pellegrin):**

Fernando and Cesar were determined to present as authentic a view as possible, to try to make something remarkable. I'd worked in Morocco but I'd never been to Kenya or anywhere else in Africa. The sights, sounds and smells are like nowhere else. It's more than just a backdrop because *The Constant Gardener* is an African story, dealing with how the West uses the continent as a laboratory.

[Quotations from the Production Notes]

Meirelles' arresting style … creates a vivid sense of place. Working again with cinematographer Cesar Charlone, the director overexposes some scenes, producing a kind of white on white. Meanwhile, in the slums and villages are a riot of deeply saturated colours. The camera jumps and tries to focus, as if a documentary film crew were shooting the film. Editor Claire Simpson keeps the story rushing forward as Alberto Iglesias' soft music, containing hints of African rock, pulsates in the background. - Kirk Honeycutt

**Character Notes**

**Justin Quayle / Ralph Fiennes**

* a career diplomat, used to doing as he's told, used to controlling his feelings
* courteous, restrained, he is a gentleman – and a gentle man
* is a creature of moderation and compromise, apparently without strong views of his own; a keen gardener, he is quiet and uncommitted politically
* has a fumbling, self-effacing kindness - his words are half swallowed, his features perpetually tinged with guilt
* his name Quayle suggests both fear and the flightless game bird; Justin suggests a sense of correctness, uprightness, justice
* seems temperamentally unsuited to being the hero of a globe-trotting political thriller
* when he first meets Tessa, he is overcome with the desire to comfort and protect this furious (and very pretty) antagonist. If he makes her feel safe, she clearly makes him feel alive. He falls in love with Tessa probably because she is everything he is not.
* he may seem diffident and meek, but his self-image is, underneath, healthy and confident – the opposite of most people who are more likely to be the reverse, blustering on the outside and unsure on the inside
* lives by a code of conduct that includes allowing Tessa to be her own woman even as he feels excluded and neglected by her
* **his need** to determine whether Tessa loved and was faithful to him is the driving force behind the first part of the story; after he regains his faith in her, he replaces this need with the equally driving need to complete what she started.
* as he follows her trail and uncovers her secrets, he grows to admire and love her even more passionately than when she was alive, to recognise that her humanity and idealism, though flawed, far exceeded his own
* is first seen farewelling Tessa at the airport as she leaves with Arnold; then tending his flowers
* he is rescued by Tessa – in her life but especially after her death – from becoming like Pellegrin
* *I'm completely inept with computers.*
* *TESSA: I see you buying the mob fish and chips... while you wait for law and order to return. And I love you the way you are.*
* *I have not acquired a taste for Kenyan tea, I'm afraid.*
* *I have to finish what she started.*
* *LORBEER [to Justin] … do you believe an individual can redeem himself by good acts? JUSTIN: I do, yes.*
* *This is a child's life! There are no rules to cover that!*
* *PELLEGRIN: a true gentleman – courteous, self-effacing, large of heart.*

**Ralph Fiennes:** Theirs is a retrospective love affair. There are two equal parts to this movie. On the one hand, it's a political thriller about corporate wrong-doing, malfeasance and manipulation. On the other it's about the relationship between Justin and Tessa Quayle. Justin's journey traces not only what Tessa was investigating; he's also playing detective about their relationship. This man rediscovers and reassesses his own relationship with his wife. It's a wonderful part, because he goes from being a reticent nice guy to being someone who is forced to confront some pretty tough truths about the world. I hope the audience sees him as a kind of Everyman. Justin is a passionate gardener. There's an internal quietude about gardeners, this sensitivity to watching something live and grow, and caring about how something will flourish and bloom. To me that was all key to Justin. Why does he marry someone as opinionated and passionate as Tessa? I think they are drawn to one another because opposites do attract.

**Meirelles:** At first Justin appears very passive. He's a civilised British gentleman, a polite diplomat who lives by a code. He doesn't fully know what Tessa does; sometimes he would like to interfere but he doesn’t, not because he's weak but because he has an agreement with her, and he lives by that code as well. We were all interested in exploring just why Tessa was interested in him. She needs an anchor and Justin keeps her sane; he's so controlled and she's so passionate.

Ralph Fiennes' aristocratic gait makes him seem remote and inaccessible from a distance, but looking closer, he's a remarkably expressive actor, capable of revealing emotional depths through a quiver in his voice or a slight crack in his visage. In other words, he's the perfect John le Carré hero: reserved and sophisticated, possessing the driest of wits, yet deceptively passionate in a way that people never really anticipate from him. …

… *The Constant Gardener* belongs to Fiennes, whose mourning process is also a process of discovery, as he finally and touchingly gets to know the woman he married. His gradual awakening ignites the film with an urgency that's both political and personal, and gives it a relevance that transcends fiction.  **– Scott Tobias**

**Tessa Quayle / Rachel Weisz**

* half Italian, half English: *these Latin genes* (first cousin Ham); *Ciao, my darling; Te amo; push you into the Tiber…*
* an aid worker and outspoken political activist – an unusual mate for a diplomat.
* passionate, committed, angry, determined, fiery – "Quite scary," Justin says on their first meeting
* combines passion, energy and commitment with a forceful and articulate intelligence
* does not care about protocol or what others think of her (e.g. her relationship with Arnold)
* stumbling on a scandal, she becomes driven, asking questions and demanding answers, making a spectacle of herself when necessary and never letting up.
* is secretive to protect Justin, yet cynically breaks his code of conduct to get what she wants
* her behaviour is driven by her desire to uncover the scandal she has stumbled on, and to help others
* enormously compassionate, she truly cares for the world and its people.
* *I feel safe with you.*
* *SANDY: You've gotta do something about Tessa. There'll be hell to pay, I can tell you.*
* *S: Tessa, you've got to stop involving yourself in matters that don't concern you. You're embarrassing the High Commission, and you're not doing Justin's career any good.*
* *Yes, but these are three people that we can help. Please. Justin.*
* *Hi, Birgit. More questions. Tessa never sleeps.*
* *The agreement was... that my work was going to be my own. That's what makes me who I am. I mean, if you stop me from doing my work, then I am nothing.*
* *You know me well enough to know that I'm not going to take no for an answer.*
* *J: I hope you didn't find her too troublesome, because she could be a terrier when she had a scent.*
* *I really hate to think how it would hurt Justin if he knew. I've violated his code, Ham, in the most cynical way. And the end that justifies my means? I need this creep to help me blackmail Her Majesty's government. Please tell me I'm not a ruthless bitch. Please tell me that Justin would understand if he knew.*
* *J: You say you're all into saving lives around the world, but you let your poor plants die.*
* *I say put people first.*
* *some bleeding heart diplomatic wife and her black lover… your resident harlot*

The character of Tessa is drawn from real life. Le Carré dedicated the book and the film to a passionate activist and aid worker Yvette Pierpaoli, whom he describes as having "lived and died giving a damn". In 1999, at the age of 60, she was killed along with two other aid workers and their driver in a car crash in Albania. She started work at age 19 in Phnom Penh; le Carré remembers her using every means at her disposal – feminine wiles or bullish argument – in service of her cause, which was an absolutely non-negotiable visceral requirement to get food and money to the starving, medicines to the sick, shelter for the homeless, and papers for the stateless.

**John le Carré:** Though by age, occupation, nationality and birth, my Tessa was far removed from Yvette, Tessa's commitment to the poor of Africa, particularly its women, her contempt for protocol, and her unswerving often maddening determination to have her way stemmed quite consciously from Yvette's example."

She is almost out of control, and he is almost too much in control. They look at each other and see what's missing in their own nature.

**From the Critics:**

Ralph Fiennes and Rachel Weisz are perfect for the roles. He brings a cool reserve to his part. Justin is a gentle individual, a tender of flowers who would rather talk than act. Fiennes captures the essence of such a man, and how he reacts when pushed. Weisz, despite being in less than half the movie, is a firecracker, and Tessa's shadow looms large even when she's not around. She brings passion and energy to the part; *The Constant Gardener* crackles when she's on-screen. **- James Berardinelli**

It's a love story between a man and a ghost, and Fiennes and Weisz give every gesture and glance a haunting erotic urgency. The under-rated Weisz is electrifying in her richest role to date. And Fiennes plays this reluctant hero like a gathering storm, his performance growing in power as passivity ceases to be an option. – **Peter Travers, *Rolling Stone***

In a remark that may be more clever than it is true, Katharine Hepburn said of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, "She gave him sex; he gave her class." Rachel Weisz doesn't need class… but Ralph Fiennes needs sex, and part of the wonder of this earnest, carefully crafted political thriller is the way Weisz draws out in him a guarded sensuality that's all the more affecting for how tentative it is.

Weisz and Fiennes play husband and wife: he's a quiet, decent English diplomat, with the pheasant-under-glass name Justin Quayle, who believes he knows how the world works; Weisz is Tessa, an activist who actually goes out into that world to shake it apart. And while the "constant gardener" of the title is most obviously Quayle (he spends much more time fussing over his rhododendrons than effecting diplomacy), it's Tessa who does the more constant tending, and not just when it comes to sexual nurturing: the grand, dark joke of the movie is that it's she who exterminates *his* political naiveté, as if it were a deadly garden plague.

Meirelles, instead of just riffing on stereotypes of English repression, seems to understand that repression actually reinforces, rather than negates, the presence of sexuality. (If it weren't there in the first place, what would there be to repress?) He is in tune with his lead actors, and they're beautifully in tune with each other. Weisz, always a lively and appealing actress, is compelling here in a way she's never been before. Each time she appears, the movie gets a few more gradations of light and texture, and a few more provocative angles.

In a flashback scene, we see Tessa, before their marriage, begging Quayle to take her along. Quayle, surprised but intrigued by the proposition, mutters something about how they hardly know each other. "You could learn me," she implores, and a cautious flicker of a smile crosses his face, the first clue we get that her impetuousness speaks to something deep inside his solid heart.

While Tessa sees bureaucracy as the enemy, Quayle is the sort of man who has always had faith in the system, and not just because it has given him such a comfortable life. He needs to believe in a sense of order – he needs to believe that, with some brainpower and a bit of paperwork, everything will shake out right in the end. Although that may sound like stereotypically English stiff-upper-lip machismo, in Quayle it's the exact opposite: unlike Tessa, Quayle is far too sensitive to face up to chaos. *The Constant Gardener* goes beyond making the point that the political is personal; it shows how the bureaucratic can be personal too – the mechanics of the system can be a comfort to us not necessarily because we're lazy or uncaring, but because without them, we're not really sure how to proceed.

Through much of the film, Quayle is the very definition of uncertainty. The biggest question is not the exact nature of the corruption Tessa was about to uncover before her death; it's how far Quayle will go to set things right.

Meirelles clearly trusts his actors, particularly Fiennes and Weisz: the plot is fairly intricate, but in the end, the story is told mostly in their faces. Weisz has never been better: she's joyously expressive and alive, but there's gravity beneath that milkmaid complexion. She's grounded even when she's being flirtatious. And Fiennes has never been more moving: occasionally, Quayle looks at Tessa with a kind of helplessness – not weakness, but simply an inability to reconcile what's so wondrous about her with the clear-cut, organised world he so deeply believes in. In the end, he realises that there's no reconciliation between the two. She's his tragedy, his salvation and his perfect partner: he does everything she does, only backward, and in oxfords.

– **Stephanie Zacharek, *Salon.com***[abbreviated]

Meirelles populates the movie with perfectly cast le Carré villains like Danny Huston and Bill Nighy, men who seem so refined and witty that it's hard to picture the black moral rot that's emptied out their consciences. - **Scott Tobias**

**Sandy Woodrow / Danny Huston**

* Head of Chancery and later Acting Head of Mission
* calls himself Justin's friend but is two-faced and treacherous; Iago-like, he feeds Justin's jealousy
* is a company man through and through – called to choose between the woman he says he loves and the career he cherishes, he chooses his career.
* is genuinely upset at what has happened to Tessa, and feels guilty over his betrayal, but gets on with things
* is morally weak; knowing what damage the drug trials are doing, he prefers to look away
* *Darling Tessa, you have hurt me more than you know. Trusting you to be honourable, I afforded you, against all the rules, an opportunity that you have abused in the worst way. I beg you, for the sake of my career, to return what you took. If you will not, then at least save what is left of me by chucking in your ridiculous sham of a marriage, as I will mine, and bolting with me to the end of the earth. I love you, I love you and I love you. Sandy.*
* *I loved her. I'm not ashamed of it.*
* *Christ, Justin, stop bleeding for bloody Africa and show some loyalty. We're not paid to be bleeding hearts. You know that, Justin. We're not killing people who wouldn't be dead otherwise. Look at the death rate. Not that anybody's counting.*
* *I betrayed her. We all did. You did it by... growing flowers.*
* *TIM: Silly sod was besotted with her*

Huston is an expert at playing moral weakness. **– Mike LaSalle, *San Francisco Chronicle***

Huston somewhat overdoes the sinister aspects of a diplomat who tries to conceal the depth of his involvement in the case***. - Variety***

The only one to strike a slightly "off" note is Danny Huston, who is miscast as Justin's slimy boss. **- Berardinelli**

Danny Huston, in a rather too-large supporting role, comes much closer to … the stiff-upper-lip cliché. **– Zacharek**

* **Discussion**

Huston is the only actor found wanting by critics (though he is admired by some). Why might he be seen as a weak link in the cast?

[There seems to be something too American about him for the role – he lacks that casual ease, that unquestioned sense of one's rightful place in things that Ralph Fiennes, Bill Nighy and Donald Sumpter all have. That sense of irony.]

**Sir Bernard Pellegrin / Bill Nighy**

* appears in only three scenes yet makes an indelible impression
* is referred to may times – he presides over the story like a poisonous spider
* very smooth, pretends friendship but is cold and ruthless
* a genteel bully - there is an iron fist under his velvet glove
* epitomises the morally bankrupt manipulator behind the scenes, the civil servant who will bend any rules to serve his country's interests – and perhaps his own
* seen first at the reception at the BHC in Nairobi
* unlike Sandy, he does know what he is doing when he tells Crick where Tessa will be
  + *Do you no good to go poking around under rocks, Justin. Some very nasty things live under rocks, especially in foreign gardens. Advice of a friend.*
  + *The issue here is deniability. If nobody told us Dypraxa was causing deaths, we can't be held responsible. But, my dear Sandy, should it ever become known... that we've closed our eyes to the deaths, none of us would survive the scandal*

… first-rate support, particularly from Bill Nighy as the Mephistophelean mandarin from the Foreign Office ***- Guardian***

… the incomparable Bill Nighy shows a knack for soft-spoken villainy that makes you wish for a dozen sequels

**– A.O. Scott, *New York Times***

**the three diplomats are in different places on a continuum of moral responsibility.**

* Pellegrin shows us what Sandy will become; he is the arch-manipulator, a moral black hole.
* Tessa might have saved Sandy – he asks her to run away with him, though whether he would have gone through with it if she had said 'yes' is another question – but he chooses his career instead; he is genuinely appalled by what happens to Tessa, but all his subsequent actions show he is following in Pellegrin's direction.
* Justin might have become another Pellegrin if he had not had Tessa to keep him honest, if he had not finally come down on her side and chosen moral integrity.

**Other Minor Characters**

**Tim Donohue / Donald Sumpter**

* sophisticated, , very smooth, courteous; dry, witty; a sense of irony – a good character
* subverts expectations – seems to be on the side of darkness but offers Justin friendship and help
* *J: Thought you spies knew everything, Tim. // Only God knows everything. He works for Mossad.*
* *KENNY: You're what passes for James Bond around here. Get Her Majesty's secret service to pull a few strings. It's what you spies do, isn't it? // Is it? Never really sure what it is we do.*
* *J: Well, I think Tessa was right then, Tim. You don't know everything.*
* *You do have another friend, believe it or not. … Let's be honest with each other, shall we? // J: That's a late career change for you, Tim.*

**Ghita Pearson / Archie Panjabi**

* works at the BHC but never clarified what she odes
* is a friend of Tessa's and Arnold – is in the photograph with Arnold and his boyfriend
* speaks up at the meeting where Sandy reports Arnold's death – shows courage and integrity
* her plot function is to provide Justin with some early answers in his search for the truth
* *You know that I'm here for you, don't you?*
* *J: Because they trusted you, and so do I. Help me, please, Ghita.*
* *J: Ghita's my only friend here, Tim.*

**Marcus Lorbeer / Pete Postlethwaite**

* like Pellegrin, is talked about as much as he is seen
* is the doctor who designed Dypraxa and who presided over the trials; when he became aware of the damage it was doing, presumably tried unsuccessfully to stop it, and went to the Sudan to work as penance
* *KENNY: That Bible-thumping bullshitter*
* *I only give the food to the women, Mr Black. The women make the homes. The men make the wars... and hooch. Adam was God's first draft. He got it right with Eve.*
* *It's how they expiate their guilt. Pharmaceuticals, the aid agencies, everybody. This whole machine is driven by guilt.*
* *… do you believe an individual can redeem himself by good acts?*
* *Maybe the redemption is in the struggle, huh? God has your head. The devil has your balls.*

**Kenny Curtiss / Gerald McSorley**

* memorable in a few scenes, especially on the golf course
* rude, rough, does not play the game – a bully, a bit of a thug (parallel and contrast with Pellegrin)
* tells Justin the truth but not for moral reasons; he is going down and wants to bring others down with him
* *Don't even think about bullying me, old man. I'm not a member of your gentlemen's club. I don't have to play by the rules.*
* *Let's just say if I'm going to the wall, I want a trophy*

**Crick / Nick Reding**

* a shadowy figure – seen often in mirrors
* is not even given a first name, appropriate in a character who has no moral substance
* has a definite air of menace about him – yet not a stereotypical heavy; is less thuggish than Curtiss
* CURTISS: *if I wanted you dead, I would've brought Crick with me.*

**Themes – an Approach**

###### Step 1

Class discussion to clarify just what is meant by 'theme'. Encourage them to think outside the concept of 'the moral of the story', and see themes as ideas, issues, concepts that are explored in literature and film.

###### Step 2

Divide the class into groups of four or five. Each group should reach consensus on the three most important ideas explored in the film. (Consensus requires discussion and persuasion rather than allowing some ideas to be simply ignored or rejected.)

**Step 3**

Each group should produce a chart/poster with three columns, with details under the following headings:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| idea/theme | scene(s) where it is illustrated or is relevant  characters who illustrate it + quotations  film techniques used to highlight it | significance |
|  |  |  |

###### Alternatively, whole class discussion after step 2 could decide on the major themes; each group is then allocated one theme to create a chart or table for.

###### Step 4

Report back to class. Several approaches:

1. Each group presents its findings to the class orally. The poster/charts can be pinned up afterwards.
2. Each group writes up their findings on the board. If the board is big enough, it can be divided into columns, with all groups writing up findings at the same time. [Students enjoy doing this.]
3. Each group contributes to notes built up on the board by the teacher. This is the most efficient method and tends to avoid too much repetition.

###### Step 5

Class discussion and agreement on the most important of the ideas. It can be surprising and rewarding to see how young people will see things in ways that adults may not.

**NB** The political themes are writ large and hard to miss. Encourage students to explore the more personal ideas also: how important it is for individuals to stand up and be counted, the power of love and commitment. Trust is another significant idea explored; a good discussion topic would be how much Justin's loss of faith in Tessa is her fault, how much his.

**Some comments from critics:**

It is harder to take literally what happens in this film. The premise is that the profiteering impulses of global capitalism (thuggishly embodied by Gerard McSorley's drug-company executive) are enabled by the diplomacy and trade policy of Western governments. This seems quite plausible. Less so is the idea that this collusion is propelled by conspiracy, skulduggery and murder. Given the power of the villains and the weakness of the victims, it would hardly need to be. So it may be best to take the cloak-and-dagger elements of *The Constant Gardener*, and the vision of justice with which it concludes, as metaphors, symbolic crystallisations of a reality too complex and diffuse to be dramatised by more empirical means. Justin Quayle, then, is an allegorical figure, an emblem of timid virtue roused to heroic action by the discovery of his own complicity with evil. **- A.O. Scott, *New York Times***

… the most powerful aspect of the movie is what it has to say about the way medicines are tested in third world nations without the consideration of negative side effects, and how bad things that happen during these trials are covered up. *The Constant Gardener* is fiction, but the incidents it portrays are based on real-world events from Africa and Asia. **- James Berardinelli**

It is not just an intricate, despairing meditation on the shabby compromises involved in maintaining Britain's interests and waning foreign prestige. There is real anger here, and a real sense that it Z is worthwhile striking back against wrongdoing. **- Peter Bradshaw, *The Guardian***

The closing scenes are as cynical about international politics and commerce as I can imagine. **- Roger Ebert**

**"The World's Biggest Drama"**

**"The world's biggest drama is not found in Europe or the Middle East or North America – the world's biggest challenges and dramas are found in Africa."**

– United Nations emergency relief co-ordinator Jan Egeland,

quoted in *New York Times*, May 2005

When independent British film producer Simon Channing Williams read an advance copy of John le Carré's *The Constant Gardener* in late 2000, he wrote an impassioned letter to the author's lawyer, pleading to be allowed to turn it into a film. He even offered to fly to New York that to plead his case.

**Simon Channing Williams, Producer**

I wanted to prove to him how serious I was about making the book into a movie, because I thought the book was extraordinary. It delves into the rapaciousness of big business, the abuse of the African peoples, governmental corruption, and at the root of it all, an utterly compelling love story. It was such a heartfelt angry book and sadly I believe it will remain relevant for many, many years to come. I'm not a political animal but what we are exploring is happening today, in the world we all live in.

The novel addresses the issue of corporate social responsibility and giga-profits in the pharmaceutical industry.

**John le Carré:**

I might have gone for the scandal of spiked tobacco… I might have gone for the oil companies… but the multi-national pharma world got me by the throat and wouldn't let go. Big Pharma, as it is known, offered everything: the hopes and dreams we have of it; its vast partly realised potential for good; and its pitch-dark underside, sustained by huge wealth, pathological secrecy, corruption and greed. **(2001)**

**Dr Bonnie Dunbar**, a molecular biologist and former professor at Houston's Baylor College of Medicine, who now makes her home in a suburb of Nairobi, vouches for accuracies in the film's plot.

I was quite fascinated by parallels with things I have experienced in my personal life. The lobbying by the international organisations, as well as the amount of money poured into cover-ups ring true to me. Hopefully the murder aspect is not true to life but when there's big money involved…

**Fernando Meirelles, Director:**

The chance to take on some of the pharmaceutical industry was one of three elements that made me want to direct *The Constant Gardener*. Another was the chance – the choice – to shoot in Kenya. And it is also and fundamentally a very original love story – a man who marries a younger woman, and it's after she dies that he truly falls in love with her and goes looking for her. It's a beautiful tale with a touch of existentialism.

I'm from Brazil and over the past several years, we have been making generics, and if you try to make cheap versions of patented medicines, you very quickly learn a lot about the unbelievable power of the drug industry lobby… I realised that making a film is a good opportunity to prod them. *The Constant Gardener* is not so much political but, as a person from a developing country, I understand what happens in one. So I felt I could represent the Kenyans' interests in the film.

Since 1977, Brazil has been able to successfully reduce its death toll from AIDS by half, defying the pharma manufacturers and ignoring the threat of trade sanctions to provide low-cost anti-retroviral drugs. The country also fielded an aggressive preventative campaign. Despite the progressive model Brazil has instituted, its efforts have not been replicated elsewhere.

**Jeffrey Caine, Screenwriter:**

I don't expect *The Constant Gardener* to change the conduct of the international pharmaceutical companies. It might – best case – draw the attention of audiences to certain widespread practices of Big Pharma and in some small way help to create a climate for more responsible behaviour. The most important thing for me is that the film should illustrate the nature of commitment.

[– from the Production Notes]

**Themes: Some Ideas**

**Facts are the bones beneath the skin of a le Carré novel.**

**the scandal of Big Pharma**

* the film says that the drug companies overcharge Africa for drugs

GRACE MAKANGA: *My continent, Africa, is staggering under the weight of not one, but three plagues. Yet still the governments of the U.S.A. and Europe, at the behest of the pharmaceutical companies that seem to control them, drag their feet and continue to give us endless reasons why we should buy your branded drugs at five times the price.*

* that they pour AIDS drugs into Africa to mask the testing of other drugs:

JUSTIN: *In the big pharmaceutical companies. African guinea pigs. Cheap trials for unsound drugs. Uninformed consent extorted with threats against children. … Payoffs, cover-ups. … Unmarked graves. … Murder.*

TESSA: *They're a drug company, Arnold. Come on. No drug company does something for nothing.*

TESSA: *Now, Sandy, if I tell you that that girl over there was being murdered, would you believe me?*

BIRGIT: *Wherever there are drug companies testing their drugs on people who they think are expendable, you'll find organisations like ours trying to fight back. Of course, the problem is that they have millions to spend on P.R. while we work with volunteers and a few donated computers.*

JUSTIN: *And that treatment is Dypraxa? But if they don't give consent, then they lose the right to medical care. It's not much of a choice, is it? I suppose they're not even informed that they're testing a new drug.*

HAM: *KDH make Dypraxa. ThreeBees test it. It's a marriage of convenience, of course. Both in it for what they can get out of it.*

* that they use Africa as a dumping ground for out of date drugs

LORBEER: *Free medicines, Mr. Black. Most of them well beyond their sell-by date. The drug companies donate them. It's a tax break for them. Disposable drugs for disposable patients. Out here they have absolutely no shelf life. Safest thing to do is incinerate them. Big pharmaceuticals are right up there with the arms dealers. This is how the world fucks Africa, Mr Black. // JUSTIN: Blood on their hands? // LORBEER: It's how they expiate their guilt. Pharmaceuticals, the aid agencies, everybody. This whole machine is driven by guilt.*

* that the diplomatic world connives with this for economic gain

Pellegrin via JUSTIN: *Diplomacy, therefore, as we've demonstrated, is the very map and marker of civilisation, pointing nations the safest way through country fraught with peril.*  – very ironic

GHITA: *If it threatens British commercial interests, it would've been shredded.*

SANDY: *We're not paid to be bleeding hearts. You know that, Justin. We're not killing people who wouldn't be dead otherwise. Look at the death rate. Not that anybody's counting. –* very cynical; he is a moral vacuum

*SANDY: Curtiss is one of us. He's British. Christ, Justin, stop bleeding for bloody Africa and show some loyalty. That plant KDH built in Wales could have gone to France. Fifteen hundred jobs in a depressed region. We owed them.*

* although the interests in the film are British, the culpability is shown to be more widespread than that. Germany, Switzerland and Canada are specifically connected – *KDH is Swiss-Canadian* – as is the USA, via the use of George W. Bush's phrase "axis of evil"

**the widespread corruption in African governments**

CURTISS: *A word or two from me in the right black ear, a couple of cases of Krug, and you'd be on the next plane back home. I mean, I spend more money on champagne in a year than your shop's annual budget.*

*TESSA: There is just one thing that I'd like to thank Dr Ngaba for – the free nevirapine. He's persuaded the manufacturers to donate it to HIV-positive mothers. It's a wonderful thing. The problem is, it isn't actually reaching them. Some, but not all. So we've been wondering – is that a standard cock-up, Dr Ngaba, or were the pills converted into the limo that you arrived in?*

**the film manages to take a swipe at the Iraq war also**

TESSA: *[Peaceful means] are not exactly exhausted, are they? I mean, they're just lying in the way of the tanks. … We've taken years to build up this international organisation called the United Nations, which is meant to avoid wars* – *and now we just blow it up because our car's running out of petrol… You are being paid to apologise for this pathetic country of Britain, and he can explain to us why we've burned our diplomatic credentials and why we're killing, you know, thousands of innocent people just for some barrels of oil and a photo opportunity on the White House lawn.*

**TESSA: *You have to take responsibility***

**Genre**

**The film combines two genres – political thriller and love story. On your own, in pairs or in groups:**

* **Make a list of the conventions of each of those genres.**

**Thrillers** promote intense excitement, suspense, a high level of anticipation, ultra-heightened expectation, uncertainty, anxiety, and nerve-wracking tension.

**Conspiracy thrillers –** the hero confronts a large, powerful group of enemies whose true extent only he recognises. **Political thrillers** – used to refer to any thriller in which there is a strong political element.

1. Thrillers often take place wholly or partly in exotic settings.
2. The heroes are often 'hard men' accustomed to danger: law enforcement officers, spies etc, or they may also be ordinary citizens drawn into danger by accident.
3. Thrillers are characterised by fast pacing, frequent action and resourceful heroes who must thwart the plans of more-powerful and better-equipped villains.
4. Devices such as suspense, red herrings and cliff-hangers are used extensively.
5. There is usually a car chase and scenes of violence.
6. The themes frequently include terrorism and political conspiracy.
7. The tension usually arises when the main character(s) is placed in a menacing situation or mystery, or an escape or dangerous mission from which escape seems impossible. Life itself is threatened.
8. Plots involve characters coming into conflict with each other or with outside forces - the menace is sometimes abstract or shadowy.
9. While a mystery climaxes when the mystery is solved; a thriller climaxes when the hero finally defeats the villain, saving his own life and often the lives of others. In thrillers influenced by *film noir* and tragedy, the compromised hero is often killed in the process.

Note: the spy novels of John le Carré explicitly and intentionally reject the conventions of the thriller.

* **Decide which of those conventions are adhered to, and which are changed and in which ways.**

plenty of suspense, uncertainty, anxiety; the plot is a mixture of conspiracy and political

* 1. Kenya is a sufficiently exotic setting
  2. Justin, though a diplomat, would qualify as an ordinary citizen.
  3. little action; Justin does evade his watchers but barely keeps ahead of them. It is not a priority.
  4. lots of red herrings – but in the love story plot, not the thriller
  5. There is one car chase, which ends not with a violent confrontation but with a civilised meeting of friends – deliberate subversion of genre. There is violence – Justin is beaten up – but not done for entertainment value. Short, sharp and real. The murders are likewise more shocking by being downplayed.
  6. political conspiracy is an issue
  7. there is a contract on Justin's life but he makes no attempt in the end to escape it
  8. the menace is shadowy up to a point – it has its face in Crick
  9. Justin solves the mystery, but never faces the villain; instead, he is assassinated. Not really *film noir*, though.

# has some of the features of the thriller but is subversive of as many conventions as it follows.

**Romance**:

Follows some of the well-known conventions. However, focus is on one lover pursuing the truth about his partner and her fidelity or otherwise after she is dead. He gets to know her and to fall even more deeply in love. Since she is dead, can be no happy ending; Justin accepts death as going home to Tessa – almost a happy ending.

As with the thriller, the film rewrites the genre.

* **Does the film have features of any other genre? If so, give details.**

It has many elements of 'the quest'.

A quest or odyssey works on the shaping and moulding of a hero, who must travel long distances, overcome a series of obstacles for which courage and heroism are called for until he reaches enlightenment and realisation that elevate him to a new level of being by the end. His journey is both physical and spiritual. The obstacles he meets and overcomes test the nature of his resolve, though it is also one of acceptance – he must accept his fate, his destiny. It involves the symbolic transformation of death and resurrection to the birth of new self.

Justin fulfils many of these criteria; he certainly reaches new levels of enlightenment, and becomes a 'new person', very different from his old persona, during his search for the truth. He is twice told to get past Tessa's death and live – by Ham and by Tim – but chooses to continue. His symbolic 'rebirth' takes place in the Chelsea house, when he asks for a new passport; his actual death at the end can be seen as his rebirth with Tessa.

**From Novel to Film**

* **Here are a few of the events of the novel that did not make it into the film. For each, suggest how it has been altered for the film, and suggest a reason. [If you wish to write an exam answer about adapting the novel to film, you will need to read the book itself.]**

# the main reason for many – most – of the changes is simply that a two hour film does not have time for the dense detail that a 500+ page novel can include.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **in the novel** | **in the film** | **reason for change** |
|  | the POV of the first three and later chapters is that of Sandy Woodrow or of his wife Gloria | the POV is more Justin's than anybody's and seldom Sandy's | the emphasis shifts to Justin's search; Sandy is less involved; Gloria hardly at all – third person limited POV is less effective in film |
|  | Sandy investigates the details of Tessa's murder before telling Justin she is dead | no investigation suggested or shown | not enough time |
|  | He learns that there was only one room available in Loki for Tessa and Arnold, with two single beds | that Tessa and Arnold shared a room is given as evidence of their affair | part of the misdirection of audience and Justin |
|  | Tessa and Arnold were on their way to see Richard Leakey | to see Grace Makanga | She is a fictional character; Leakey is a real man. Easier to use her as a conduit for information |
|  | BHC head Porter Coleridge bemoans Tessa's feminism but says, "Give Africa to the women and the place might work." | Porter hardly in the film; Lorbeer expresses this idea | too many characters – too confusing for audiences. No need for Porter |
|  | Justin goes to stay with the Woodrows; Gloria becomes very fond of Justin | left out | not enough time; Gloria a very minor role |
|  | Justin rescues Tessa's computer and her files from the house | the police confiscate the computers | strengthens the idea of police corruption, of the surveillance of Justin; means he needs Ham and Guido |
|  | Two detectives come from Scotland Yard to investigate Tessa's murder. | one detective, in one scene; it is Justin who uncovers the conspiracy | too complicated |
|  | They find out about Wanza Kilulu and Lorbeer and pass it on to Justin | shown through flashback and Justin's investigation | too complicated – novels can have layers but a film needs to be clearer and simpler |
|  | from chapter 4, the POV shifts often to that of the investigating officers | as above | too many POVs – the film prefers to stay with Justin or be objective |
|  | F/B: Sandy visits Tessa in Uhuru where she is suckling Baraka; he is aware of her exposed breasts | her breasts are covered; Sandy chats her up in the car a week earlier | the scene by the car makes Sandy's sexual interest in Tessa more obvious and just as creepy; his thoughts are harder to show |
|  | Sandy lusts after Tessa but also after Ghita | left out – makes his feelings for Tessa seem more genuine | no time; another unnecessary complication |
|  | On the plane to London, Justin remembers his sessions with the detectives, during which he tells them about meeting Tessa. | the meeting is shown in flashback | the novel's double flashback is too complicated |
|  | He met her four years before at Cambridge. She was a lawyer attending a seminar | He meets Tessa in London; she seems to be a student but not clarified. Time not established. | London is more easily visually identifiable than Cambridge |
|  | Tessa questions Justin about the responsibility of the state and its citizens | she questions him about British involvement in the war in Iraq | more topical, less abstract; easier for audiences to understand and relate to |
|  | The detectives, back in London and part of the surveillance team watching Justin, provide him with the documentation he needs to leave England. | Ham provides the passport courtesy of a 'dodgy client' | detectives have been left out – too complicated |
|  | He goes to Italy where a boy Guido, whose education Tessa is paying for, helps him get into the computer; he accesses her files | It is Ham's son Guido who retrieves the files from Tessa's mirror server. | the Guido of the book, while adding a great deal to our understanding of Tessa as a character, adds nothing to the plot |
|  | Justin finds vicious death threats among Tessa's papers | he shows Ham a death threat he received himself | When he finds the death threat, and the file, Justin thinks about them at length – trying to come to terms with the fact that Tessa had not told him. This can only be done on film via voice-over – not appropriate – or discussion – and there is no one to discuss it with.  Photo more visual. |
|  | He learns from her computer that Arnold was gay | Ghita shows Justin a photograph |
|  | As soon as he goes on line, a virus trashes Tessa's hard drive | Guido downloads and prints everything; HIPPO has its computers stolen | another complication too far; police at HIPPO is more visual that a computer virus |
|  | Justin travels to Canada in his search for the truth about KDH | left out | some Canada scenes were filmed but left out as not needed |

* **The novel gives a great deal of backstory re Tessa that the film ignores e.g. that she is a 'contessa's daughter'; that she is a lawyer. Why?**

The film is much more Justin's story and Justin's journey. It is just part of the slimming down of a dense and complicated story to something more manageable.

